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WASHINGTON, D. C.

RANK AND NOBILITY.

A STORY—BY JEANNE MARIE.

Translated for the Era, by Dr. Edwin A. Atlee.

INTRODUCTION.
The night was impenetrable dark, when an elegant travelling coach was lost on the wide plain of Tuche, and the coachman, having come down from his box, was vainly searching to discover the road. In the bottom of the coach lay a fair young wife, half resting in the arms of her husband, who sat beside her, half reclining on and imbedded by soft cushions. Opposite her was the maid, with a smelling bottle and reviving drops.

The coachman blustered and swore, the waiting-maid lamented and sighed, the sick wife frequently inquired with anxiety, and her companion alone was able to maintain an encouraging air.

In this manner the wanderers were uselessly driven hither and thither for more than an hour in the darkness, becoming more hopeless every moment, when suddenly the waiting-maid cried—

"A fire! Certainly a fire by robbers!"

The attention of the searchers was now drawn to a glimmering point, which at no very great distance seemed like the light of a Pharos, promising deliverance. Fresh life coursed in the veins of the traveller. Gently he withdrew his arm that encircled the patient, supported her carefully in the bottom of the coach, sprang out, and hastened to the star of the wilderness. Satisfied with the result of his toil, some wandering, for as he approached he discovered a solitary collier's hut, he went to its lighted window, where at a glance he could see the inside of it. Though it was night, several persons were seen sitting about inside. On a mean bed lay a young wife, and near her, wrapped in rags, a new-born child, over which the languid looks of the sick woman were cast, like pale rays of the sun.

"A mother," thought the stranger, "she will and must be compassionate."

But far from the cold old woman was cooking on the hearth, from which the flame sent the light to the wanderer, a parable, so at least it appeared, which she busily stirred with a long wooden shoving in a round kettle.

On the stone bench, stretched at full length, lay a large, robust man, with wild, unkempt hair and beard, and indifferently staring at the fire and the movements of the old woman.

The stranger had but taken a glimpse of the group, when he knotted himself at the door. No answer followed, but he was obliged to repeat the knock three or four times, until a faint light and sound came from within the hut, till at length, when they were convinced that no ghost was playing his pranks, but a human voice begged for admittance, a small shawl above the door was opened, and an eye that seemed to belong to Polyphemus peered through the opening.

"What's wanted?" asked a rough voice.

"A traveller, who, with a sick wife, is lost in this endless wilderness, and seeks a shelter for the night," answered the other.

"What shelter?" replied the same hoarse voice. "Here is no tavern for straggling travellers. No inns here. There is sick enough here already." With these words the shawl was again closed.

The stranger, however, lost not heart. Too much depended on this game, and he durst not give over.

"Stop!" thundered he, with imposing tone. "Do not be so much in a hurry to shut me out. Count Eiseheim, the richest land owner in the round of twenty miles, from your door. Here is gold; and now delay no longer, but open the door."

The Count's words though spoken in a commanding tone, would have been heard without attention, if the sight of the full parable had not given evidence of his intention to pay beforehand.

"Can you still daily?" continued he; when suddenly the shawl was drawn entirely back, and a set of long, meager fingers were ready for a grip of the purse. "Can you still linger, when you may save the life of a fellow creature, a sick woman, who has also a mother, like her that stands there near the couch?"

A weak voice was now perceptible, whose pleading seemed to melt the heart of the man and woman, who were by this time counting their money. Finally the door opened, and let out the giant form of the collier, who in surly mood, came with a pine torch in his hand to accompany the Count to the coach, where the patient anxiously waited for her husband. Eiseheim lifted her safely out, and carried his wife to the collier's hut, not knowing whether he embraced the living or the dead.

Having reached and entered the hut, the Countess was placed beside the collier's wife, on the miserable couch; and towards morning, after an anxious night, she bore to the Count a daughter. But the happiness of the father was alloyed by solicitude for his wife; the keen joy of calling a new life into the world was blunted, and he trembled for two beings dear to him.

Soon as the first clear gray morning rays kissed the waste desert, the Count mounted one of his coach-horses, and hastened to the nearest inhabited place, to disclose the best possible aid, but without success. Neither a trustworthy physician nor apothecary, or other assistant, was to be met with.

Disappointed by this unavoidable but several hours' wait, and after an absence of several days, Count Eiseheim, with his wife, returned to learn the truth of the collier's hut, in giving. He found the Countess still alive, less a victim of the tedious journey, which it was necessary to take to distant relatives on account of property, and which required their presence at a certain place and time. Life was offered up for the possession of a gift of fortune, subject to the most cruel accidents; and the Count, who was certainly free from all blame, could not, however, acquit himself, and stood bent over her, whose death was occasioned, as he said, by his self-interest. As he had married purely for love, but formed the connection chiefly and disguise the little reproach lay so much the heavier on him.

The last thing that he could now do to quiet his conscience, was to provide for the internment of the corpse in Eichen, the principality of the Count. With broken heart, he for the second time left the dwelling in which but now an infant belonging to him had breathed the breath of life, and whom, if he did not wish to expose to certain death, he must needs leave behind, where it received its first nourishment from a healthy woman engaged to nurse it.

The chambermaid, who remained to take charge of the little Countess, was, in consequence of the exertions and relaxations of the previous hours, fast asleep, so that she was not aware of the Count's departure; and in the but the will of which had been begun by accident, but to spin out a cunning selfishness was about the coarsest rags, and the little baby in fine cambric and woolen. Here where the form undergoes a change with almost every hour, the knavery of an exchange could not be resisted.

It was late in the evening, and the child, oppressed with fatigue, was awakened by low sobbings. The collier's child had apparently expired with

spasms, and the old woman would not suffer any one to see the little distorted body.

The one imposed on was not inclined to doubt, but thanked Heaven for the preservation of the loon committed to her, and saw with gratification the return of the Count, and that she was with him to leave a place where the hand of the spoiler had been at work so destructively.

While the girl, tortured with anxiety, seemed to sympathize most deeply with the grief of the bereaved mother, the old woman, under the pretext of procuring a coffin for the dead child, had left the hut, and hurried over the wide desert to a solitary pasture ground, half demolished and excavated by time and the elements. Here she deposited a little bundle, and then squatted near a tree, where she had not tarried long when a lone horseman came that way.

"I know," she muttered, "that he is riding over, in order to confess the old wife."

She raised herself up when the horseman approached, wrung her hands, and in a shrill voice began to complain of the hardness of her bed and uncharitableness of mankind, who had exposed a child here, a prey to the weather and starvation.

"I might, in compassion, easily take the poor little woman home with me, were I not afraid that Lorents would pay me for it with his rough fist. O dear Lord! what wicked people there are in the world, and Lorents is one of them. Kate brought him a little child, and it is dead; and he like a sinner is glad that he is freed from it. No, I cannot take the straggling there."

The stranger, the child opened its eyes and began to cry piteously.

"Lord, what is now to be done with the poor thing?" exclaimed the old wife, weeping. "Heavenly Saviour, have mercy on us."

With hasty resolve the horseman took possession of the child; while the old woman, sobbing, blessed the good deed, and the forlorn orphan. He wrapped the little helpless creature in his cloak, and again mounted his horse. The old woman ran beside the horseman a good way till she came to the next village, where she pretended to procure a coffin for Kate's poor little child.

When Count Eiseheim had arranged everything for conveying the remains of his wife to the family vault, he returned to the collier's dwelling on the next day, and there found deep affliction. The old woman came up to him, and wept; while the man lay quietly on the stone bench, and Kate was bathed in tears.

"How do you find Prince Hypolith, my dear Count?" asked he. "Altered—larger—bold—handsomer? How?"

So saying, he cast a look toward a window pane, in the depth of which a young man, who seemed to concern himself with the noise and bustle of the hall. His outward appearance was outlandish and dark. Black hair fluttered over his forehead when he danced, black eyes flashed like diamonds when he spoke, and his plain dark dress harmonized with his position, looking like a man of the capricious pomp, and in which could be seen the contempt of all its vanities. Count Eiseheim looked for a moment at the young Prince, then with a smile said, "I wish the father as much joy of his son, as I presume he has forebore. Prince Hypolith seems full of the inflammable passions, and looks like a man with a desire to take the world by storm, and reduce it to subjection. He is certainly never better pleased than when sailing over breakers at sea, or standing at the edge of a precipice or a giddy height, agitated by surrounding storms. He seems of a character that finds pleasure chiefly in the element of insurrection, in conflict with obstacles."

"Yes, yes, you are right," replied the Duke. "Hypolith would think it quite picturesque to lean upon a rugged wall of rock, and look out upon the storm-lashed sea. But may God preserve him from so perilous a situation."

At this moment the young Prince ran up to one of the ladies in the dance, whirled round with her a few times, and left her exhausted, standing alone, without paying her any further attention. There was nevertheless a certain complacency in the mind of the forsaken lady, as she looked after the dancer.

Seraphine von Globen, a neat, almost fragile person, fair and slender as a fly, with light brown hair, fine animated features, altogether a model of a female, so delicately was she formed, had frequently during the evening looked with complacency to the door, where an expression of dissimulation somewhat darkened her lovely countenance. This shade was dispelled by the extra tour of the Prince—a notice that would not have been unacceptable to an elder lady, who despite her present years, and face intersected by numberless lines, gave the impression of youth and animation. Some what austere, almost cold in her manner—more interesting as the result of the constraint of a courtly atmosphere, which she had breathed from childhood, as well as from want of inward warmth stamped upon her exterior—she was at first very forbidding, but gained on nearer acquaintance. The Duke, however, coming up to her, asked: "My lady Minister, did you see how Hypolith waltzed with your niece?"

"Truly, I did," she calmly replied, "but many such stony dancers I could not reply for my delicate niece; she could not bear it."

The little creature ought not to dance at all," said the Duke, laughing. "And by the way, I never saw two such interesting persons."

"Hem, hem," observed the Duke, "the Count even now is a handsome man, despite his fifty years."

"Lofly and stately he moves in the throng," continued the Minister's lady, "the type of grace and beauty, and his eyes are just as different from the young ladies around her, as a fresh Alpine rose in a hot-house among the little stunted plants that are hardly distinguishable."

The Minister's lady suffered herself to be withdrawn from the object of her admiration, and for a moment speaking on a subject which was irksome to the Duke, who now left her.

Meanwhile Erika stood opposite the lady, feeling an interest in every one whom she met, the sight of whom for the moment seemed to afford her animating engagement. The gesture of the maiden was magnificent as that of a queen. The form of an Amazon, the glance of a gazelle, the freshness of a country lass, and the earnestness of a thinker, all united to constitute the Duchess one of the most interesting of women. Her toilet to-day was a white Moorish dress without ornament. Erika never wore jewels, and her glossy, dark hair, fell in short locks about her head and neck, a few seldom and at last were quite strangers to each other. She was the grand little Duchess, and she was the plain farmer's wife. I can now only touch her clothes and kiss them, and humbly salute her at a distance, so good and kind does she still continue to me."

"It does me good that she is as much of quality as a Princess," bellowed Lorents. "God gives by this, that if our only one gets a good education, what is right will come out of it. My heart always laughs when she comes with her father to the stone quarry, and all the workmen take off their caps to her, as if she were a queen. And then, when I say to her, 'Kate again.' But this was more and more seldom; and at last we were quite strangers to each other. She was the grand little Duchess, and she was the plain farmer's wife. I can now only touch her clothes and kiss them, and humbly salute her at a distance, so good and kind does she still continue to me."

"O, then had no notion of what I suffer, and have suffered on this account. When the child was yet little, and I could carry her in my arms; while she took her nourishment from me, and I could kiss her and hug her, then I was happy; then I believed it would always be so; but when the master afterwards gave us this farm-house, and I had to leave the palace and live alone here with thee, my heart was ready to break. I indeed often visited the child, and it hung round my neck, and was glad to see her Kate again. But this was more and more seldom; and at last we were quite strangers to each other. She was the grand little Duchess, and she was the plain farmer's wife. I can now only touch her clothes and kiss them, and humbly salute her at a distance, so good and kind does she still continue to me."

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"Take care lest I spit thy brain-pain, if thou do that. Wilt thou bring misfortune on thyself and me, and the child, too, thou thoughtless woman?"

"God stand by me as thou now dost. I have not yet done it. But if I only knew what has become of the poor little thing that we cast upon the world so unmercifully."

"On my conscience, Anne did that, and it has been a blessing to the earth."

"Well, it is then in good hands. But many a time I grieve in the night, so that I cannot sleep, when I think that the child perished."

"Well, now I let me sleep quietly, Kate; I am tired."

"But what shall I do when she goes quite away? I have the child here, and may lay myself in the grave. If I only see her sometimes, even at a distance, when she rides out with the master, or goes into great company, the prettiest of them all, it is a comfort to me for a long time, for many, many days. But to have none, none in the world, and not a mother's peace and quiet—this is not to be endured."

Lorents made no answer, and soon was asleep. Kate seated herself again to her wheel.

Duke Reichfeld celebrated the return of his son from a foreign tour, with a ball. Grand doles flashed, flames nodded, flowers exhaled their fragrance, costly dresses glistened, music resounded, and amusements were noisy. The saloons of the palace were filled to overflowing with the most distinguished rank, both military and civil. Though the company was very numerous, and the eye roamed from object to object, yet there was not leisure to see, to admire, to examine all. There were, however, some particular figures among the crowd, on whom the eye rested longer, and as it were poised, after unsatisfying exertion, like some one mounted in the hand of fate, and some one in a desert, or constellation in the firmament.

By a pier-glass at some distance from the group of dancers stood two men, one of whom by his imposing appearance was in marked contrast with the unmeaning appearance of the other, who was unassuming and strangely decorated. The former was Count Eiseheim, who spent the evening in company with the prince; the latter, who as usual by his manner, the tone and expression of his words, evinced much pleasure in seeing the Count once more at his residence, and then went over to the object who had been more interested in his limited powers of mind.

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what exhausted, had taken a seat, and whose blue eyes spoke to those of the Count, but received no answer from them.

While Erika, overwhelmed in the contemplation of the Minister's lady, was leaning on a high velvet fanteuil, she was not aware that a young man was without intermission observing her. Baron Globen, Seraphine's brother, a young elegant, who made no special pretences of earnest conversation with, or warm feeling for Erika, was content to be near her, in order to obtrude upon the gay world the remark that he was pleased with the Countess, waited on her everywhere, and danced with her. Believing that he had kept silent long enough, and seeing that Erika's attention was not quite freely fixed on him, he resolved to speak, and request her to dance with him.

"I thank you," replied she, quite disconcerted; "I am engaged."

"Engaged?" said Globen, much surprised. "Why have you been more than half an hour standing by the pillar like a statue?"

"And you would now bring some life into the statue. I perceive your good intention."

"And must I content myself with this supposition?"

"Why not, since you have obliged me to it?" Globen bowed. "Very flattering, but what is a man to do?"

"Let him apply himself to do right. Besides, in order to compensate you for the refusal to dance, I request you to conduct me through the saloon to the Minister's lady, your aunt. I must speak with this honorable personage without delay."

Globen was prompt to fulfil Erika's wish, and in a few minutes she was seated on a table next the matron, looking at her with her hyacinthine eyes so beseechingly and searching, that she involuntarily directed to Erika the inquiry, "What business is it about any favor, but something grand, sublime," replied the maiden.

"What could I wish from you that is not so, and of whom could I desire more?"

"Flatterer!" said the Minister's lady.

"Flatterer? No," answered Erika, very earnestly, and somewhat surprised to find herself so completely comprehended.

"I hate all flattery, for it is the twin sister of lying, and at least I could not so disgrace myself as to flatter in view of your honorable and distinguished character. By flattery the vain are bribed and won, and the pure are offended. Erika, you will not, but win you by flattery. I will 'nevertheless for a price—the price of my love. I know that you observed me with the unflattering eye of a critic: tell me then, candidly, what was the result of your scrutiny?"

"My complete satisfaction," answered the lady.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Erika, "then I have not deceived myself. I read this satisfaction yesterday, the day before, and to-day, in your eye, and built upon this perception my hopes."

"What are they?" asked the Minister's lady.

"Desire me not eccentric," proceeded Erika, with great earnestness, "nor inconsiderate, that here, in a place so little suited to the circumstance, I touch on a subject to me of the greatest importance; but it presses so heavily on my breast, that I must know if you will adopt me."

"Singular child," answered the Minister's lady, "methinks you need no prop."

Erika cast a glance on the surrounding company, and after she had convinced herself that their attention was taken up with the tour of contraband, and found herself as it were alone with the matron, she said, not without emotion:

"I never had a mother, dear lady, never tasted the bliss which a mother's love can confer. What I have so long been deprived of has suddenly been made dear to me. I have, 'tis true, entered the gay world at the side of the most honored man of the age, but without a female guide and adviser. Ever since I saw you, dear lady, the ardor desire of my heart was explained; I knew what I wanted. I now live with you to make me inexorably rich, or my mother—will you permit me to say so?—together destitute and poor. Will you be my mother? I will be your daughter, and hereafter you will be my mother, and I will give ready obedience to your will? Say but a single word."

While Erika silently and with repressed breathing waited an answer, a smile played upon the countenance of the lady, who with serene eyes replied:

"What shall I say to you, Erika, since you have made me unexpectably happy by your honorable proposition. But would I be capable, in the comprehensive sense which you fondly contemplate, to support myself in the station to which you would elevate me?"

"O, I will be your mother," cried Erika, "and if I have this, all will be well."

"This you have," said the Minister's lady, in a tone unusually tender.

"And now, dare I call you mother? Oh, what a magic sound is in this word! What triumph of my good fortune, confidence, and assurance! My good, honored mother! And hereafter you will be my mother, and I will give ready obedience to your will? Say but a single word."

The dance was now ended, and Count Eiseheim came up to the two females, a little surprised that Erika had absented herself so entirely from the circle of gay young ladies.

"Father," said she, brightening up, "I have found a mother! Wish me joy. Now am I superabundantly rich!"

The Count did not at first comprehend what his daughter meant; but a few words from the Duke, who had been standing by, explained the matter. The Duke, however, coming up to her, asked: "My lady Minister, did you see how Hypolith waltzed with your niece?"

"Truly, I did," she calmly replied, "but many such stony dancers I could not reply for my delicate niece; she could not bear it."

The little creature ought not to dance at all," said the Duke, laughing. "And by the way, I never saw two such interesting persons."

"Hem, hem," observed the Duke, "the Count even now is a handsome man, despite his fifty years."

"Lofly and stately he moves in the throng," continued the Minister's lady, "the type of grace and beauty, and his eyes are just as different from the young ladies around her, as a fresh Alpine rose in a hot-house among the little stunted plants that are hardly distinguishable."

The Minister's lady suffered herself to be withdrawn from the object of her admiration, and for a moment speaking on a subject which was irksome to the Duke, who now left her.

Meanwhile Erika stood opposite the lady, feeling an interest in every one whom she met, the sight of whom for the moment seemed to afford her animating engagement. The gesture of the maiden was magnificent as that of a queen. The form of an Amazon, the glance of a gazelle, the freshness of a country lass, and the earnestness of a thinker, all united to constitute the Duchess one of the most interesting of women. Her toilet to-day was a white Moorish dress without ornament. Erika never wore jewels, and her glossy, dark hair, fell in short locks about her head and neck, a few seldom and at last were quite strangers to each other. She was the grand little Duchess, and she was the plain farmer's wife. I can now only touch her clothes and kiss them, and humbly salute her at a distance, so good and kind does she still continue to me."

"It does me good that she is as much of quality as a Princess," bellowed Lorents. "God gives by this, that if our only one gets a good education, what is right will come out of it. My heart always laughs when she comes with her father to the stone quarry, and all the workmen take off their caps to her, as if she were a queen. And then, when I say to her, 'Kate again.' But this was more and more seldom; and at last we were quite strangers to each other. She was the grand little Duchess, and she was the plain farmer's wife. I can now only touch her clothes and kiss them, and humbly salute her at a distance, so good and kind does she still continue to me."

"O, then had no notion of what I suffer, and have suffered on this account. When the child was yet little, and I could carry her in my arms; while she took her nourishment from me, and I could kiss her and hug her, then I was happy; then I believed it would always be so; but when the master afterwards gave us this farm-house, and I had to leave the palace and live alone here with thee, my heart was ready to break. I indeed often visited the child, and it hung round my neck, and was glad to see her Kate again. But this was more and more seldom; and at last we were quite strangers to each other. She was the grand little Duchess, and she was the plain farmer's wife. I can now only touch her clothes and kiss them, and humbly salute her at a distance, so good and kind does she still continue to me."

"For shame, Lorents, to be so proud and conceited. Don't it grieve thee at all that we have cheated the good master so?"

"Is it not the same to him what sort of a child he has? Is he not quite happy?"

"He is so, as long as he does not know it; but when he shall be informed, how then? Many a time have I been almost ready to tell him all about it."

"Take care lest I spit thy brain-pain, if thou do that. Wilt thou bring misfortune on thyself and me, and the child, too, thou thoughtless woman?"

"God stand by me as thou now dost. I have not yet done it. But if I only knew what has become of the poor little thing that we cast upon the world so unmercifully."

"On my conscience, Anne did that, and it has been a blessing to the earth."

"Well, it is then in good hands. But many a time I grieve in the night, so that I cannot sleep, when I think that the child perished."

"Well, now I let me sleep quietly, Kate; I am tired."

"But what shall I do when she goes quite away? I have the child here, and may lay myself in the grave. If I only see her sometimes, even at a distance, when she rides out with the master, or goes into great company, the prettiest of them all, it is a comfort to me for a long time, for many, many days. But to have none, none in the world, and not a mother's peace and quiet—this is not to be endured."

Lorents made no answer, and soon was asleep. Kate seated herself again to her wheel.

Duke Reichfeld celebrated the return of his son from a foreign tour, with a ball. Grand doles flashed, flames nodded, flowers exhaled their fragrance, costly dresses glistened, music resounded, and amusements were noisy. The